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Alcohol, Other Drug and Gambling Problems in Alberta

Services and Perspectives

May 2005

AADAC Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission
An Agency of the Government of Alberta

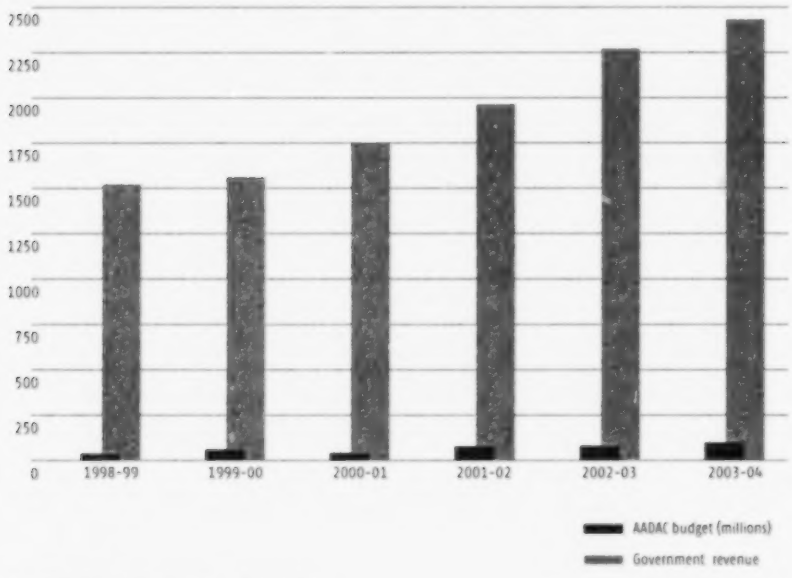
1. The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC)

- AADAC is mandated by the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Act to operate and fund services addressing alcohol, other drug and gambling problems, and to conduct related research.
- Chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, cancer and obstructive pulmonary disease, along with injuries, are the leading cause of death and disability in Alberta. The most common chronic diseases are linked by a few risk factors, such as unhealthy diet, lack of exercise, tobacco use and substance abuse.
- AADAC services play a key role in supporting the objectives of health innovation and wellness in Alberta. The Commission provides addiction information, prevention and treatment services that are available on a local, regional and provincial basis.
  - AADAC and AADAC Funded Services are located in 48 Alberta communities.
  - AADAC provides information, prevention, assessment, referral and outpatient counselling services through urban clinics and area offices.
  - Shelter, detoxification, short-term residential treatment, and halfway houses are available regionally.
  - Intensive treatment for youth, opioid dependency treatment, and specialized services for business and industry are offered through provincial centres.
- In 2003/04, AADAC provided information and prevention services to more than 95,000 Albertans and treatment services to almost 30,000.[1]
- Most clients (adults and youth) report using alcohol and tobacco. More than 50% of clients report using marijuana and about one-third also report using cocaine.[2]
- Increasingly, clients are using more than one substance.[2]
- Four per cent of clients seek treatment for gambling problems only. An additional 2% seek assistance for gambling combined with alcohol or other drug problems.[2]
- One-third of AADAC clients report buying lottery or fundraising tickets. VLT play is the gambling activity that clients are most likely to identify as their activity of concern.[2]

- In 2003-04, 96% of AADAC treatment clients were satisfied with the services they received and over 90% reported they were abstinent or improved following treatment. They reported reduced gambling or use of alcohol and other drugs, and improvements in key areas such as employment, health and family relationships.[1]

- Budget

  Over the past five years, AADAC's budget as a percentage of government revenue from alcohol, tobacco and gambling has increased slightly, from 2% in 1999-2000 to 2.2% in 2001-02 and 2.4% in 2003-04. In 2003-04, AADAC's budget was $59.9 million; revenues from alcohol, tobacco and gambling were $2.5 billion.[1, 3, 4]



2. Trends and issues

Alcohol

- Eighty per cent of Albertans 15 years and older consume alcohol and approximately 3.5% of the population are alcohol dependent.[8, 9]
- Annual per capita consumption of alcohol, at 8.6 litres, is above the national average. This is the equivalent of 506 (341-ml) bottles of beer per year for each Albertan 15 and older.[10]
- Among Alberta youth, 56% of students aged 11 to 19 consume alcohol and 13% drink at hazardous or harmful levels.[11]
- Since the mid-1990s, there has been an increase in the prevalence of alcohol consumption and in the prevalence of heavy drinking in Alberta.[8]

Tobacco

- Twenty per cent of Albertans (15 and older) are current smokers. The prevalence of tobacco use is highest in the young adult population aged 20 to 24 years (31%).[12]
- The majority of Albertans support government efforts to reduce smoking: 88% support smoking bans in places where children are allowed and 72% agree with laws to prevent smoking by youth.[13]
- Most Albertans (78%) support banning tobacco use in all Alberta workplaces.[13]

Illicit Drugs

- Fifteen per cent of Albertans 15 years and older use cannabis (marijuana or hashish) and 3% or less report using other drugs like cocaine, speed (amphetamine) or heroin. An estimated 1% of Albertans are drug dependent.[8,9]
- Among Alberta students (11 to 19 years) the most popular drug is cannabis, with 28% reporting use and 5.8% showing signs of dependence.[11]
- About 10% of Alberta students report using magic mushrooms or mescaline, 6% use inhalants, and 5% report using club drugs (ecstasy or crystal methamphetamine).[11]
- An estimated 11,000 Albertans use drugs by injection.[14]
- Since the mid-1990s, drug use has been increasing among youth, although rates are lower than in the 1970s.

Prescription Drugs

- In 2002, 4.0% of students reported using "uppers" (stimulants) without a prescription and 2.3% reported using "downers" (depressants) without a prescription.[11]
- Indications are that prescription drug abuse has increased since the 1980s, and there is growing concern about chronic use of multiple prescriptions, especially by seniors.[15]

Gambling

- Eighty-two per cent of adult Albertans gamble, and approximately 5% of Albertans 18 and older experience moderate to severe problems as a result.[16]
- Of Alberta students, 41.2% gamble and 9.5% report gambling problems.[11]
- Gambling opportunities have increased in Alberta and across the country and public concern about increased accessibility is apparent.

3. Consequences of addiction

- Addictions occur within communities across the province. Alcohol, other drug and gambling problems affect individuals and their families, and result in considerable social harm and economic cost.
- Twenty-one per cent of total mortality in Alberta is due to the use of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs.[5]
- A national study showed that 54% of federal offenders were under the influence of alcohol or other drugs while committing their crimes, and about 38% of inmates were assessed as dependent on alcohol and/or illicit drugs.[6]
- Problem gambling can lead to a number of serious consequences including depression and anxiety, substance abuse, loss of employment, financial instability, and criminal involvement. Gambling is a factor in 2% of suicides in Alberta.[7]
- About one-third of Albertans (38%) have experienced harm (such as verbal and physical abuse, family problems and marital problems) as a result of someone else's drinking. Fewer Albertans report being harmed by their own drinking (10%) or drug use (18%): harm occurs, for example, in the form of physical health problems, negative effects on friendships, financial difficulties and problems with employment or school.[8]
- The estimated cost of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drug use in Alberta was $1.6 billion (in 1992); this amounts to $613 per person. The majority of costs associated with substance abuse in Alberta are productivity losses, health-care costs and law enforcement costs.[9]

4. Looking forward[15]

- The Alberta population is growing and becoming more diverse. Alberta has one of the youngest populations in Canada. Alcohol and drug use tends to be highest in the youth and young adult population. Youth attitudes toward drugs (especially cannabis) have softened.
- The Aboriginal population represents one of the fastest growing and youngest populations in the province. Rates of problem gambling, solvent abuse, prescription drug abuse, and use of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs are higher in this population than in the general population.
- The senior population is expected to increase significantly and steadily over the next few years. Addiction concerns for seniors are likely to centre on the use of multiple medications.

- Increasing numbers of lone-parent households and one-person households and growing social and geographic isolation for some populations will increase the reliance on formal social support agencies.
- The use of technology will continue to affect Albertans. The younger generation prefers to seek services and information through the Internet. Many gambling activities are easily adapted to the Internet and this is a growing yet unregulated industry in Canada.
- Society is increasingly relying on a variety of drugs (e.g., alcohol, minor tranquillizers, and antidepressants) to manage stress in daily life. This trend appears to be more common among the younger generation.

5. AADAC Priorities

Regardless of the age, socio-economic status or gender of the people who experience them, addiction problems are complex. Concern is growing about chronic use of multiple substances, the co-occurrence of addiction and mental health problems, and the potential consequences of increased gambling opportunities both in the treatment population and in the general population.

Access to Services

Demand for AADAC services has increased and this is likely to continue. AADAC's priority is to maintain access to the existing provincial system of addiction services. This will require continued research and ongoing commitment to partnerships to consolidate and extend service reach.

Improving Services

Growing demand for AADAC services requires a deliberate focus on extending services where the potential impact will be greatest. Priorities are completing the spectrum of services available for youth (detoxification and residential treatment) and initiating or enhancing specialized services for Aboriginal people, women, seniors and people with opioid dependence.

Strengthening Partnerships

Individuals, families, communities and governments all play a part in effectively responding to problems related to alcohol, other drugs and gambling in Alberta. AADAC places a high value on working in partnership. An Alberta Drug Strategy designed to support communities and interdepartmental and cross-sectoral partnerships will increase overall system co-ordination and capacity.

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Local services

Alcohol, drug, tobacco & gambling problem services

- information
- prevention
- assessment and referral
- outpatient counselling

Regional services

- shelter
- detox
- residential (short-term)
- halfway houses

Provincial services

- Youth intensive (Edmonton, Calgary)
- Opiate dependency (Edmonton, Calgary)
- Business & Industry Clinic (Grande Prairie)
- Training

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For more information, contact your local AADAC office,
call 1-866-33AADAC or visit our website at www.aadac.com

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